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SAVAGES I HAVE KNOWN.

THE HALF-BLOOD.

My experiences of the Spanish Main could supply a hundred examples of the 'mestizo' savage. I select for illustration that specimen which most irritated and amused me at the time.

He was, and very likely is still, the parish priest, the *cura* of a little mountain village. On the map hanging against my wall, this hamlet, which I recollect so well, is marked in big letters as a town of the second class. The fact does not surprise me; our geographers are so utterly ignorant, scientifically, of Central America, that, where they have traced the course of big rivers, I have tramped along dry-footed; in a morning's walk, I have crossed mountain chains of theirs higher and broader than Helvellyn; I have eaten 'pappas' and 'zapotés' in the midst of their deserts; and shot fish on the cone of their volcanoes. It does not at all astonish me, then, to observe that this little oasis in the Sahara of trees, lost as it is and stifled among the eternal leaves, should be raised by our well-intentioned topographers to the dignity of a borough.

We had reached it late one evening; and never, I recollect, was traveller more glad than I to gain his journey's end, for my feet were full of *neguas*—jiggers, as West Indians call them. I never examined this little pest with a microscope; but, on Mr Waterton's authority, I accept the fact that it presents the appearance of a flea in miniature. Unlike that lively creature, however, the *negua* prefers an underground life, burrowing beneath the skin of man and beast, and under that shelter, marrying and giving in marriage. If undisturbed, it will breed and breed in its hiding-place, till a permanent lameness is caused, and amputation of the part attacked—generally the feet—becomes necessary. I have seen the most horrible, most incredible deformities produced by this tiny plague, which is not bigger than a pin's head; and never, after the experience of that day, did I fail to have my feet examined each night, to arrest in time the proceedings of the enemy.

We found shelter in the hut of a carpenter; and next morning, after a painful extraction of the jiggers and their brood, I crawled across the plaza, under guidance of my host, to find the parish priest; for we had heard of notable antiquities, earthworks, and tombs, and ruins in this neighbourhood, and wanted his encouragement in exploring them. Under the shadow of a little church, built of mud, roofed with sunburned tiles, and flanked on either side the entrance by a ghastly, wide-mouthed idol of stone, a remnant of the old times, which it would scarcely have been safe or wise to remove now, we found the 'parsonage,' a filthy den of two apartments. Its roof, like all others of the village, sloped out beyond the house-wall, supported on four posts of wood, and thus formed a sort of piazza. Therein hung a hammock of twine, in which was suspended the *cura's* body, between heaven and earth; but much, much nearer, now and at all times, to earth than heaven. Three ill-looking fellows lounged against wall or post around him, smoking cigaritos, and half-dozing, though the sun had been up two hours. There was a bad smell about the place and about the men; not merely the sensible odour of drink, and dirt, and unhealth, but an odour morally unwholesome. A mean and wretched spot enough was that plaza outside, its faded grass strewn with rags and broken shards, a dingy little church on its one side, a dingy *presidio* on the other—with naked ruffians of soldiery lounging about the door—and a row of kennel-like huts around. But the sun beat broadly down upon it, the diamond-bright air quivered, parrots and blue jays fluttered across it, returning from the river to the deep forest shade; whilst under the gloom of that portico, of which the shadow fell keen and blue as a steel blade upon the ground, the three men blinked and muttered like unclean things; and their spiritual guide, hanging in the centre, poured out rings of smoke from his swollen lips, and grunted in dogmatic monosyllables. This scene we beheld, walking up the colonnade before the huts.

On coming nearer, one of the clerical *compadres* turned, hearing the unaccustomed sound of boots

upon the hard clay floor. At his low exclamation of surprise, the *padre* raised himself, and stared, in a brutally silent fashion, at ourselves. After a moment's examination, he sank back again along his hammock, with a muttered remark, at which the three friends laughed aloud. We came up and stood beside him. While the carpenter humbly explained our wishes, the priest regarded us with sleepy insolence, until one of my companions, a hot-headed French miner, declared his intention of pulling the *gredin* out of his hammock. Whether the cura understood the threat, or whether he was influenced by a hint of possible profit to the church, judiciously dropped by our host, I don't know, but he rose in a languid manner, with the assistance of all his three friends, and descended. Then we perceived that a vicious life, and not years or privation, had swelled the priest's face and limbs. He was probably not more than twenty-five years of age. His face had the fleshy bloated roundness that tells of brutality; his eyes and lips that moisture and unsteadiness which continual indulgence brings. It was not an ugly face in feature. The dark and brassy skin, the hair curling slightly in dank tresses, the prominent eyes and cheek-bones, plainly revealed his 'mixed blood'; but the unnatural combination is not always uncomely. He was dressed in a long and filthy *soutane*, and trousers of the very brightest pea-green. Round his neck were twisted several coils of blue glass beads. A little pouch of feather-work, adorned with a fringe of mouse's teeth, hung upon his chest, beside the crucifix. What it contained, the owner only knows, but it looked suspiciously like a charm-case. His feet, of course, were bare, and the pea-green trousers only reached to the ponderous calf of his legs. Such was the figure that descended from the hammock, and stood sullenly staring before us. A more savage, wicked-looking face, for all its rude proportion of features, never saw I in my wanderings. 'These English gentlemen have come to your town to find "Carib" antiquities,' began our French companion. '*A su disposicion*,' blundered the *padre*, with an air of utter bewilderment.

'They hear that a great castle of the "Caribs" exists near this, and many graves where the "Carib" kings were buried.'

(All through Central America, Indian remains are called 'Carib.' This designation has not, of course, any connection with the mahogany-cutters of Honduras, who now bear the old title without much justice or reason.)

'*A su disposicion*,' muttered the *padre*.

'They want you to help them in finding the Carib remains.'

Then his savage blood broke out. 'I'm not a Carib!' shouted the cura, his thick skin puffing with rage. 'I'm not a prying devil of a foreigner (*un curioso entremetido de los diables*!). Soy caballero Catalano, ah! There's no one here cares a "monkey's grin" about your heretic charms, your devil-stones, and unholy things! Ach! Go to the French brutes across the mountains then! Perhaps they'll help you to your soul's destruction!' Then turning his back on us with unspeakable contempt and hatred, he

snatched a mule-whip from the hammock, and addressed one of his friends: 'How goes the lame mare, Guleërmo mio?' he said.

Our French companion seized the insolent scoundrel by the trailing skirt of his *soutane*, and twisted him sharply round. It was a face perfectly fiendish which this priest turned on us. He raised his heavy whip; and the three worthies made an ominous movement of the right hand towards their machetè hilts; but we, throwing back the loose edge of our jackets, quietly displayed the revolvers on our hip. With that quickness to apprehend personal danger which is characteristic of the savage wherever I have met him, and that equal disregard of personal dignity, our *padre*, on the instant, changed his expression to one of sulky complaisance, and said: 'What can I do for your service? I know nothing of Carib remains. We are very poor here, in this town; very, very humble. It is with difficulty that my sheep support their miserable existence, and provide for the eternal safety of their souls. You see, señores, they have no time to search for old stones and Carib rubbish. They are not Caribs or heretics here, thanks to the good St James; and they know that honest people do not care for such things, if they exist—that is, not honest people of this country, you see, señores! For my own part, caballeros, rely upon me to do all that is possible to assist you; but there never were any Caribs in this neighbourhood, nor other *mala gente*, until the gold was discovered on the other side the forest. But'—and here his sudden change of tone was delightful for the cynic to perceive—'twenty leagues further over the mountain are plenty of Caribs even to this day. I know nothing of them myself, but our bishop endeavours to convert those poor heathen, at great cost of prayer and money: if any of your dignities feel the Christian spirit, and desire to advance their eternal welfare, I am the unworthy receiver of such contributions as your benevolence may choose to offer. Any sum, however small, may, by the good St James's blessing, be instrumental in rescuing a soul. Let me pray of your dignities;' &c. We tossed him a dollar, and left, hoping never again to behold his face, so expressive of a brutal hypocrisy. And even while we passed from off his portico into the wholesome sunshine without, he proceeded rapidly to gather up the long skirts of his garment for riding, to roll them round his fat waist under the girdle, and thus to display all the length, and more especially the breadth, of his pea-green trousers.

Two days afterwards, we left the village on our way to the gold-diggings. There we passed our Christmas as merrily as is possible in the most extraordinary settlement of an extraordinary country; and a fortnight after, rode back to the hut of our carpentering host. In the evening, while we sat without his door, watching the red sunshine pass swiftly up and up from bough to bough of the great forest trees on the opposite hill-side—ah! those days, those sights of my past wanderings, how divine regret stirs within me in recalling them!—a clamour in the street above disturbed our meditations. We looked up, and beheld our foe, the *padre*, staggering towards us, yelling out the equivocal ditty: '*De Guadalajara vengo, lidiando con un soldado*,' &c. The villagers stood at their doors, looking without surprise or

* I have softened the *padre*'s language considerably. His metaphorical anathema was very picturesque, but untranslatable.

apparent disgust at their pastor, who, with his soutane kilted, and all his pea-green trousers displayed, rolled along the street, keeping time to the music with furious cuttings and crackings of his mule-whip. He approached, and halted in front of us. After pausing a while in deep consideration of our appearance, the padre lifted his broad straw-hat, and spoke with drunken solemnity, 'Machitos caballeros,' he said, and paused. Then the brilliancy of this witticism, of addressing us as 'little he-mule horsemen,' overpowered him; he laughed long and very loud.

'Don Emanuel,' I said, 'what will your congregation think?'

'They!' he replied at the top of his voice. 'They are beasts, pigs, and are all doomed to perdition as Indian idolaters. Machitos, I wish to speak with you.'

We went inside, and he followed. When safely anchored upon a smoothed cedar 'knee,' which served for a chair, he said: 'You gave a ball, machitos, up there, over the gold mountains?' We nodded. 'There was present a young girl, *muy linda*, very beautiful, an Indian witch, a limb of the devil, with black hair reaching to her feet, eyes like mirrors, and mouth like a purple fruit, the loveliest girl in the five republics! Her name'—

'We recognise her,' interposed my friend; 'the prettiest and most virtuous creature in all your country. What of her?'

'I have spent your dollar, señores, in supplication to the saints on your behalf. May the prayer be heard!' piously continued the creature after a while.

'The prayers of a good man avail much,' observed our French companion gravely.

'A su disposicion!' modestly replied the padre, unconscious of his sarcasm. 'Did this Indian sorcerer draw you into her net?'

I answered: 'We fell in love with her, as should every bachelor caballero with each pretty and good girl he sees. But we did not think of taking her to our home across the ocean. Her French lover is our friend.'

'Ha! Her French lover! The long-limbed heretic, the'— A string of epithets followed.

'What do you want, Don Emanuel?' asked our companion, rising from his hammock.

'I am speaking to these noble caballeros,' he retorted savagely. 'They love the church, and they will hear me.'

'Make haste!' we exclaimed.

'You are rich, gentlemen, and you love the church. I have prayed for you, more than the full price of the dollar, much more. See now! That girl has bewitched me. Her face is always before me, and her voice in my ears. I never loved like this before. It is not human fascination. Caballeros, my soul will be lost because of her! Oh, sirs, have pity, and help me! Her mother is very poor. For one hundred dollars she would sell all her children. Give me the money, and I will intercede day and night for your miserable souls,' he went on. A something of real pathos in the drunken wretch's prayer restrained our indignation.

'What would you do with her?' I asked.

'I would marry, and keep her with me as long as she lives. Write down what conditions you like before the alcalde here, and I'll sign them.'

'Can you not write?' asked my friend.

'O yes. I can write my name with ease—Don Emanuel Blank,' he replied with dignity.

'You, a priest, marry!' we objected.

'Yes, yes; I will perform the ceremony myself at night, in the presence of the alcalde.'

We knew such strange abuses obtained throughout these countries, but were amazed at his openness.

'And what is to become of our friend, her lover?'

'He will not wed her; or, if he should, when his luck changes at the diggings, he will run away and leave her, as do all *machos*,' which is but too true of the wild mining population.

'This has lasted quite long enough,' said our French companion. 'Don Emanuel, we pity you, and for other reasons besides this infatuation for the Indian girl—reasons which you probably would not understand. It is not worth while to explain why all gentlemen would refuse your application with disgust, for that also lies beyond your comprehension; enough to know that you weary them. The lover of that young girl you have dared to look at is my dearest friend. The cloth which removes you from the rank of common men, the cloth you disgrace and dare to outrage, will protect you from Eugène; but I am not so gentle, priest, nor so orthodox. Out of our house, traitor alike to man and heaven!' The good but rough old digger appeared almost majestic as he ordered out that poor savage creature. We did not interfere, and, growling, he slunk away, and stumbled up the street.

So it ended at that time; but six months after, lounging in the doorway of the Howard House in Colon, I saw Eugène approaching from the wharf. I seized him by the hand.

'And the other turtledove?' I said, looking round—'the little *fiancée* with whom I danced on Christmas Eve?'

He laughed hard. 'I was over-weighted, compadre. My rival had the good things of heaven to offer besides those of earth. The *fiancée* is married long since, and her own husband read the service!'

'Ah,' I exclaimed, 'married to a priest! To the cura of —?'

'To him, my friend. He bought her for eighty dollars "strong"! They offered her to me at an advance of fifty cents! Ha, ha! And she's very happy, compadre; and I—I'm going to crack *huacos* [Indian graves] on the Chiriqui!'

PLAYING THE MOLE.

THAT dreary old edition of a double-barrelled wine-cellar continued from shore to shore, the Thames Tunnel, has at length found a purpose, and as the sub-fluvial way of the East London Railway, may prove in its old age a useful and respectable member of society. Every one remembers its troublous birth, and dissipated youth and maturity. Classed amongst the sights of London, country cousins in search of excitement were often taken down into its gloomy shades, where, lit by feeble gas-lamps, a few wretched stalls struggled to assume the aspect of a bazaar in the last stage of consumption; and after a quarter of an hour in this damp whispering-gallery—for its depressing effects were such that no one ever dared to speak aloud—the aforesaid country cousins requested to

be taken out, and walked back to the entrance, peering between the pillars, as if expecting to see piled-up coffins, or skull and thigh-bone designs, built up in the last style of catacombal art.

The old Thames Tunnel is in a transition state; with the engineering knowledge, mechanism, science, and scheming of the present to back up the experience gained in tunnelling, a new company has been formed, whose project, attracting little notice either in the past or present, is being carried forward in a most unpretending but rapid fashion, so that now, while this paper is being written, the engineer has moled his way from the London Bridge side of the Tower half way beneath the Thames; and unless unforeseen accidents should delay progress, in the course of a few months the new Tower Subway will be an accomplished fact.

Leaping the bridge of Time, or tunnelling it to the extent of those few months, let us rush into the To Be. We are at the end of Lower Thames Street, and at the foot of Tower Hill, our aim being not to take tickets for armory and regalia, but to cross over to the Bermondsey side of the river. Enter we, then, this little structure of a dozen feet in diameter—no larger, for the land upon which it was built cost the company at the rate of two hundred thousand pounds per acre. We are in a circular room, as it appears, but in reality a 'lift,' which rapidly descends a spiral shaft—the shaft turning while we retain our position. In a few seconds we stop; enter, fourteen strong, a roomy omnibus-like carriage, well lit, and padded; the door is closed, and then, with a rush, we are spun along a tram-way to the Surrey side, passing beneath barge, lighter, steamer, and clipper-ship, to where another little room awaits us, into which we step, ascend rapidly, and the next minute we are in Tooley Street, Southwark; and all for, most probably, that immortal coin that has taken the shine out of Aladdin's lamp a thousand times over—all for the sum of one penny.

Those are the plans for the future; but we will return to the present, and you shall perforce accompany me, this bright summer morning, to the works.

Here we are; and at first sight, you might pass by, under the belief that those inevitable sewers, or gas, or water, or telegraph pipes are 'up,' for there is a slight hoarding, from behind which a thick plastic clay is thrown up; a little steam-engine puffs and snorts; and a railway van unloads pieces of iron segments, evidently of a moderately sized tunnel. A few words with the courteous engineer of the undertaking, whom we find in his little office; and then, as if about to visit a mine, canvas trousers are produced; and in a few moments, we are in a mud-encountering costume, ready to descend the unprotected iron-lined shaft which yawns close by, and up which, as we look, comes a square bucket of clay, which is emptied, and then we are asked if we are ready.

Some people are never frightened; for our part, we do not belong to that class, and hence we do feel alarmed at the prospect of descending some sixty feet into a dark well with one leg in a bucket, and the other swinging over the side. But we scorn to shew our terrors; and declaring our readiness, place the left foot in the bucket, cling to the rope with fingers that seem to grow into it; and then—oh!

We do not utter that ejaculation, but we feel it; for the bucket swings over the black depth, and then begins rapidly to descend, while we experience sensations of being a Leotard performing some last new feat. The descent occupies but ten seconds, but they might have been as many minutes, so long did we have to ponder upon the distance to the nearest hospital, amounts connected with life-assurance, and sudden death.

Bump! We are at the bottom; the bucket is unhooked, and a clayey man places it upon a trolley running upon a narrow tram-way. We are invited to sit in the bucket this time, and we do, gazing forward at some tiny spark-like candles, set here and there in a long dark vista, from which comes a hollow rushing roar.

Is it? Can it be? Has the water mined its way through, and shall we be swept out, drowned out, as were Brunel's men with the old tunnel? Accidents are rather given to occur at inopportune times! But the men around seem perfectly cool and unmoved; a few warning cries are given, and then, the tunnel dipping towards the centre, we rush in our bucket-car away and away beneath the bed of the murky Thames; farther and farther into the thick darkness, till a faint glow appears ahead, apparently at a great distance, but only to prove to be quite at hand, when our muddy car stops, and we step out, to begin crawling about in the confined space, extricating our feet at every step from the adhesive clay, like subterranean beetles in progress over a fly-paper.

And now we begin to look about, to find that we stand in an iron tube seven feet in diameter, fitted together in segments, four of which complete the circle or band, two feet wide—rings, which as the work progresses are fitted in, bolted together, have cement forced behind, and then are calked at their seams with oakum and Stockholm tar—the whole forming a vast watertight pipe, whose perfection is favoured by the strata through which it is being carried, progress so far having been through a tenacious clay, so impervious to water, that the supply needed for mixing the cement has had to be carried down.

So far we are told there has not been a check; and we peer forward into the circular shield, like a vast iron big drum, which is forced forward as the work progresses, to make room for another, or another, band of segments; while the men employed delve on and on, tunnelling away in complete safety; for should there be an influx of water, they have but to step out of their shield, close its sliding doors, and the tunnel end is sealed up almost hermetically.

But though guarded against, no such danger is apprehended, especially now that the nearest point to the bed of the river has been passed. Where we now stand, about the middle of the river, we are, it seems, twenty-eight below the bed, that is to say, with that number of feet of earth, mud, and clay between us and the water flowing swiftly over our head.

'What is that rushing roar behind?' we ask. 'Only a returning trolley rattling over the tram.' But do we feel it warm? We confess to the air being slightly oppressive, and our companion, Mr Barlow, the engineer, goes to the tunnel side.

'Ting, ting!' an electric bell sounds, and a signal is telegraphed along the wire laid down to the shaft mouth: 'More air!'

'Rush-h-h-h! hiss-s-s!' Here it is on the other side, pumped down through a pipe, to come in a soft pure refreshing stream; when candles seem to burn brighter, and we gaze about at finished sides and roof.

But in the dim light shed by the candles, it almost seems as if we had penetrated to where the cherubic portion of the inhabitants of gnomeland were at work; for here and there we see yellow faces moving about, and hear blows given by invisible, tool-armed hands. Perhaps there are bodies, but we see them not—only flitting yellow faces passing the candles stuck against the wall.

And now we learn that nine feet of the tunnel are completed daily, so that, without let or hindrance, a few weeks will suffice to reach the Surrey side; and pondering upon the application of the system to the Dover and Calais project, we peer about at the handy way in which, bit by bit, the iron tunnel is put together; but all the same, feeling no unwillingness when a hint is given respecting our return; for in its present unfinished state, a hole below the bed of Thames is not a confidence-inspiring spot.

We walk back very slowly over the tenacious flooring of clay upon which the tram is laid; the darkness is not even visible, and the candles are so distant that once our feet glide from under us, and we fall—not painfully, and our clothes are canvas.

Daylight at last, even though it be at the foot of a shaft; but there is the bucket ascent on one leg, a trifle to the initiated, but a real peril to the nervous; and here once more we are hanging half-way down, performing a pleasant leg-of-mutton and bottle-jack movement: the upward progress is so slow that we appear to stand still as far as ascending goes, while our companion shouts to the brakeman to arrest the roasting motion.

It is with something like a sense of having been reprieved that the surface is reached once more; we assert that we have been delighted with our visit, declaring it to have been most interesting, but with a private resolve that we will wait, before paying another visit to the new Tower Subway, until its completion.

NODDY'S SITUATION.

IN FIVE CHAPTERS.—CHAPTER I.

'I GIVE my daughter Julia three years. You understand? If she makes a good match within that period—well; if not, I have done with her: I wash my hands of her completely.' Mrs Muciller gently chafed her left hand with her right, arranged her rings, and replaced her fingers upon the lace handkerchief in her lap, as though the operation were completed.

'Amplly sufficient, my dear Mrs Muciller, for a young lady who doubtless inherits her mother's tact for improving a favourable opportunity; and Mrs Sharing took a comprehensive glance at the drawing-room of Braithfield Villa. The room was handsome and tasteful, as even a neighbour would allow. A cool green light shimmered in through the jasmine-covered verandah, and played in wavering little pools of subdued sunshine upon the carpet. A soft green fernery had taken the place of the winter fire-grate, its beauty reproduced in a plate-glass background. The furniture modern, and doubtless elegant, but swathed up in

holland coverings, as though it were dead furniture, shrouded and laid out, waiting to be buried. A tiny fragile stem of frosted silver depended from the ceiling to carry the Greek lamp branches, hung with silver chains, and the perfect globes of egg-shell glass. The piano was Broadwood's grand; and displayed on dainty little tables, was the correct quantity of drawing-room stores.

As Mrs Sharing mentally appraised the effects in her friend's room, she was not unmindful of the favourable opportunity that had been improved. It was not so many years since a Mrs Cray, a widow with one daughter, had been a fashionable teacher of music and painting, and had found Mrs Sharing one of the most useful of patrons. It was at Mrs Sharing's house she had first met Mr Muciller, a successful speculator, who experienced little difficulty in tracing back his genealogy an extra generation for every ten thousand he netted. Mr Muciller was a rich man when he married Mrs Cray; but he went on speculating, as people will, and the crash came, and he was nearly ruined in fortune, and quite in health; for he took it to heart, and died, leaving Mrs Muciller a widow for the second time, with a handsome house and a very slender income. Still, it had been a favourable opportunity for Mrs Muciller, late Cray, all things considered.

'At least,' Mrs Muciller said, in reply to Mrs Sharing's remark, 'I can rely on Julia's discretion. She is not likely to be betrayed into an undesirable match. My daughter is not flighty, like some girls.'

When Mrs Sharing had taken her leave, Mrs Muciller thought a few minutes, and then touched the bell.

'Send Miss Noddy to me,' she said to the servant.

Norah Cray, for that was Miss Noddy, can hardly be described as a relation of Mrs Muciller, being nothing more than a kind of connection—in fact, a step-daughter, the child of her first husband, to be precise. She was a little thing for her age, which was quite two-and-twenty. She had smooth brown hair, neatly dressed, but rather odd-looking, as it actually shewed the shape of the back of the little head, without any chignon at all to improve it. She had bright brown eyes too; but you could not say she was pretty. Hers was a plain face, but good tempered and pleasant to look upon. She came into the drawing-room, in answer to Mrs Muciller's summons, in a print dress, not fashionable nor new, though neat and becoming, and her hands white with flour.

'Noddy, what are you doing, to come into the drawing-room in that state?'

'Pies,' said Noddy laconically, and smiling.

'You might have waited till you had finished your work,' said Mrs Muciller, 'as I wish to speak to you on something of importance.'

'They said you wanted me directly, so I came,' Noddy explained.

'Very well; as you are here, you may remain; but please, don't sit down, or you will be sure to soil the chairs with your floury hands.—I need not remind you, Noddy,' Mrs Muciller said with a smooth and rather pretty lisp, 'that I have sought to discharge the onerous and unthankful office of step-mother to you in two families to the best of my ability. You have too much good sense to feel hurt at not having been

placed on a precise equality here with my daughter Julia. You well know that, had your poor father, Mr Cray, still lived, you would, in all probability, have been required to take at least as active a share in household duties as you have done with me. You have therefore no reason, nor, I feel sure, any desire for complaint on that score. But it is needful I should inform you the time has arrived for a change in our mutual relations. You are aware Julia returns to-morrow from finishing her education. It is my intention to make great personal and pecuniary sacrifices, with a view to her advancement in life. It is probable we may entertain more company than we have been in the habit of doing, and consequently we may require more domestic assistance. But this and other expenses will involve pinching. I must pinch, you must pinch—we must all pinch, in fact. Under these circumstances, I am not disposed to continue to employ you in a subordinate capacity in the household, for people to make remarks about, and I cannot afford to retain you in any other. You will therefore see it to be your duty at once to look out for a situation as governess in some respectable family. I will not hurry you to a few weeks, and I shall do my best meantime to help you find such a situation; but I name three months as the time at which our present connection should cease.

'O dear,' said Noddy, her usually cheerful face becoming quite blank—'I'm sure I'm not fit for a governess. I don't know nearly enough to teach.'

'Perhaps not. No one does. What of that? You are quite as competent as many young ladies I know who go out. No girl is expected to be competent in her first place. You learn at your first situation what you want to teach at the second. It is the same in all businesses. Now, let us see what we can say in the advertisement—French, German, Italian, and the usual accomplishments, I suppose; that is the customary thing.'

'But I scarcely know a word of French, not a syllable of German, and can't even understand an Italian song,' objected Noddy; 'and as to accomplishments, I can only play hymn tunes, as you call them, on the piano.'

'Very well, miss; and pray, what of that? Nobody will ask you for more, will they? You will go with young children first; you can teach them English, and spelling, and that, and what little French you do know, and their notes on the piano; and if their parents wish for more, you can tell them it is not advisable to overfill little heads too soon, can't you?'

'But I should be so ashamed,' pleaded Noddy. 'Please, don't say all that, for indeed I couldn't teach at all when it was found out how ignorant I was of all I had professed; and people would despise me when they found me out.'

'Nonsense; nobody will find you out. Why, how do you think I began as a drawing mistress? The same as other people do. I bought my specimens of a lady artist, and always took care to bring my pupils' drawings home to be corrected by the same lady. My drawings were admired, so were those of my pupils, and I obtained a connection. I forget what became of the artist; but you may be sure she never came to any good. You see she had a certain order of talent for production, whilst I possessed the superior ability to render her commodity marketable. As to advertising anything

short of what I have told you, it would be useless; every governess does the same, for the reason that every other governess does so too. If people believe it, that is their affair; mine just now is to get you a situation; and when I have done so, I shall consider myself relieved from further responsibility.'

Noddy went back to her pies; but a heavy heart won't make light pastry, and Noddy's wouldn't rise.

The next day, Julia returned—a tall showy blonde of eighteen, with the languid air of completion which a finishing school so successfully imparts. Julia Muciller was an accomplished girl; she had learned all the last new tricks of musical execution, and shewed peculiar facility in the performance of pieces of the *Bubbings at Morn* and *Dribblings at Eve* order. These she could rattle through with an air of easy superiority to the instrument, to the music, and even to her audience, as though such trifling feats of sleight-of-hand were the most easy of accomplishment in the world, as perhaps they are when once you know the trick. She was on singing terms with most of the gushing songs of flimsy sentiment of the day. She 'knew an eye,' belonging, it appeared, to some party who had had the other one made into a star, or had lost it in some other way to provoke admiration not quite so clear. She 'saw two leaflets floating down a stream,' and expressed regret at one having to 'float onwards all alone' after its fellow had stuck in the bank. She aspired to be a bird—she 'breathed for wings'—she sighed for 'a fairy's life in an elfin grove'; but of the passion and suffering of humanity, and its loves and tears, in a world that is in earnest, Julia did not sing. She could paint groups of impossible flowers, chatter boarding-school French, embroider in beads and wool, dance, and read novels on the sofa. In a word, Julia was finished.

Poor Noddy's little heart quite sank when she was admitted of evenings to the drawing-room (when there was no company) to hear the rehearsal of Miss Muciller's accomplishments, for it made her despair more than ever of being able to lay even the groundwork for such a display. But the advertisement was already sent to a weekly paper, spite of all Noddy's entreaties, detailing her proficiency; and so she could see nothing to be done but to borrow some of Julia's early school-books, and try, in spare moments, to gain a little knowledge of what she was expected to teach. It was with some difficulty that she could even do this, for Mrs Muciller did not like to see her reading, observing that her duty was to devote her mind exclusively to household affairs, and there would be plenty of time for study when she went to her first situation. 'You have only to keep yourself one lesson in advance of your pupils,' Mrs Muciller said, 'and you are safe. It is very strange if a grown person of average ability cannot manage to compete with children to that extent.' So Noddy would get up early, and get all her dusting done, and manage to make an hour at least for study before breakfast.

Within a week of Julia's return from school, Mrs Muciller received this letter by afternoon post:

LONDON, June 27, 18—.

DEAR MRS MUCILLER—You will be surprised to hear I'm just home from Bombay—more so, perhaps, to learn I'm tired of India, and mean to

settle in England. I shall run down and pay you a visit in a day or two, and shall probably stay till you turn me out, as your cool country scenery will be a relief to eyes that still have the glare of the Indian sun in them. Don't put yourself out of the way. You need not reply, as I shall not be in London after to-morrow.—Yours,

FRANK GEOGAGAN.

'Well, that's cool,' said Julia.

'It certainly is,' replied Mrs Muciller; 'but he must come. In the first place, he is a nephew of the late Mr Muciller, and I suppose fancies he has some right in his uncle's house. In the next place, I am not disposed to dispute the point, for he has been making a deal of money in India in connection with a Reclamation of Land Company. He must have turned a pretty penny, or he would not think of settling down yet. Those Geogagans are a money-making family, and always were, and not satisfied with a little. I should have invited him myself, had I known him to be in England. I consider his visit highly desirable. You must look your best, Julia, when he comes.'

Julia languidly smiled obedience. 'But he does not say when he is coming, mamma?'

'No; just like the Geogagans—always thoughtless. However, we need not trouble about that to-day, as it is time for you to dress for Mrs Shar-
ing's croquet party.'

So Julia rang the bell for Noddy to come and do her hair.

CHAPTER II.

The 28th of June being the anniversary of Coronation Day, is kept holiday at most country places. Both Mrs Muciller's servants had hurried to get their work done early; and as 'their people,' to wit, Mrs Muciller and her daughter (for Noddy didn't count) were going out, they were given the afternoon as a holiday.

It was a real treat to Noddy to get a spare afternoon all to herself, with no work to do, and no one to find fault with her. Noddy made up her mind she would spend the time in trying to learn how to teach music. So she went in to the piano in the drawing-room. I don't like digressions, but pardon me for a moment. I would not have you think Norah Cray an ignorant girl simply because she owned herself consciously unfit for a governess: she was not that. Her opportunities had been scanty enough. She left school at thirteen to 'make herself useful.' But Noddy had read a great deal, and possessed besides much intuitive knowledge of the right and wrong of things, though without being at all times able to reduce it to such a rule and science as would properly qualify for a teacher. She at least had this wisdom, that when she did not know anything, she would make no secret of her ignorance about it; and if all of us did the same, we might none of us seem quite so wise as we do. Noddy had picked up a fair knowledge of music, though not of a showy sort. Fire-works on the piano completely baffled her; but she could play some of Mozart's quieter sonatas with taste and real feeling, and they delighted her heart, though they were utterly unsuited for display. But what Noddy was now anxious to learn was how to teach. So she began at the beginning of her Pianoforte Tutor, and went slowly on till she came to the scales, which she commenced practising.

It being very hot, all the doors and windows of the house were thrown open to get the breeze, and the fragrant breath swept in through the hall door, and along the passage, and to the drawing-room, bearing the scent of roses and jasmine to Noddy, as she sat there practising scales. It is rather monotonous work, but Noddy's whole mind was in it. She was indeed so absorbed in her occupation, that if a person had come up the gravel-path, and across the lawn, and straight into the room where she was, it is doubtful if she would have noticed it. Of course, it would be unlikely; but I say if a person had done so (the piano was at the farthest end, in the shadow of the large room), Noddy was so preoccupied, that it is not probable she would have observed the intrusion. She had been grinding away at the F minor scale, up and down, down and up—one and two and three and four, and one and two and—

'Oh, bother!' said Noddy, flinging her hands on her lap; 'what an awful little goose you are! You haven't a bit of gumption, nor a mite of common sense. As to being a governess, and can't play scales, you must be a noodle to think of it—a dreadful noodle!'

'You're about right there!' said an unmistakable masculine voice from somewhere by the door. Noddy started as if she had been shot; then she came over red and hot at being surprised. But the owner of the voice walked boldly into the room. Noddy being left in sole charge of Braithfield Villa, and seeing an entire stranger march in like this, did not like the look of it. His looks were nothing to provoke dislike, be it said—a tall, fine-bronzed man of thirty, with a tawny moustache and handsome unbrowned features. She resolved to challenge him.

'What do you want?' she said brusquely.

'You,' said he—'you are Miss Muciller, I imagine?'

'No; I am Noddy—Norah Cray, that is,' she stammered, correcting herself. 'Please, what is it?'

'Cray?' the stranger said—'Cray? Any relation to Mrs Muciller?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, I think I know, then. So you are Miss Cray, eh? You will see who I am from this card; and as you have not offered me a seat, I'll take one, after shaking hands with you.' He held out his hand frankly, and Norah could not refuse it.

'I don't know who you are,' said Noddy. The stranger had lounged himself on the sofa.

'Then, perhaps, you'll look and see.'

'Mr Frank Ge-Ge-Geog-a-gan?' asked Norah, puzzled.

'Ga-gan, if you don't mind. It's spelt heathenish, but it reads easy. You've heard of your cousin, Frank Geogagan, in India, surely? That is, he might have been your cousin, if Mrs Muciller's marriages had not mixed the relationships so confoundedly.'

'No,' said Norah.

He whistled. 'Didn't Mrs Muciller tell you I was coming?'

Norah did not wish to expose the precise state of things between herself and her step-mother, and did not choose to tell an untruth; so she replied: 'Mrs Muciller received a letter just before she went out this afternoon, but she was hurried, and I did not know its contents.—So you are expected, then?'

'I said I was coming, but not exactly when.'

'That's awkward,' said Noddy.

'Why?'

'Because we are not prepared to receive you. Mrs Muciller would have been home, and Julia, had they expected you to arrive to-day.'

'You are very plain.'

'You are not complimentary,' retorted Noddy.

'I didn't refer to your looks; but I wonder if you would insist on my saying they were anything different?'

'You can say what you please,' said Noddy; 'it is a guest's privilege.'

'Whew!' Mr Geogagan whistled softly. 'Nettled, eh?'

'No; I justify your remark, that is all. You called me plain.'

'So you are going out as governess, I heard you say. Pray, are you competent to teach?'

'I don't think so.'

'Then why do you go?'

'I think you have no right to inquire.'

'Gracious! Why, you forget I'm your cousin, and take a family interest in you already.'

'If you do, you won't ask,' said Noddy.

'But I do, and still ask.'

'Then I can't tell you.'

'Well, you are the coolest little baggage of a cousin to welcome any one home from abroad one could well expect to find. Are you not glad to see me?'

'Well, not particularly,' said Noddy. 'How should I be, never having seen you or heard of you before? Besides, you come at an awkward time, when nobody is at home. And for aught I know, you may be an impostor, and have watched your opportunity to enter the house when it is unprotected. I don't think you are that, though—you are not polite enough. But one never knows.'

'Upon my word, you are not flattering. Still, at anyrate, I think you might have offered me some refreshment, as I have just come off a journey.'

'I am very sorry,' said Noddy; 'but Mrs Muciller has taken the keys with her. I can only offer you a cup of tea or coffee, and some bread and butter. Everything else is locked up.'

As Mr Frank seemed to think that would do very well indeed, Noddy went out to prepare it, and presently returned with a tray of tea and coffee and a single cup.

'Two cups, please,' said Mr Frank. Norah was not generally accustomed to take her meals with the family. She was certain Mrs Muciller would not like this arrangement, but divining a refusal might prove embarrassing, she brought a second cup, and joined Mr Geogagan at tea. When they had finished, Mr Geogagan said he should walk up to the station to arrange about his luggage being sent, and on his return he should insist on Noddy giving him some music. No sooner was he fairly out of the house, than Norah hastened to Mrs Sharing's, to let Mrs Muciller know of the arrival of a visitor. However, Julia was in the middle of an exciting game at croquet, and learning that Mr Geogagan was gone out again, she prevailed on her mother to remain till it was finished. Meantime, Noddy returned to Braithfield Villa. In five minutes, he walked Mr Frank again, clamorous for his music. Now, Noddy was never in the habit of playing for anybody's amusement but her own, and was quite certain if Mrs Muciller heard of her

taking the liberty of playing to please a visitor, it would be considered a deadly offence. Moreover, she expected Mrs Muciller to arrive every minute.

But Mr Frank insisted with such vehemence that a refusal seemed like palpable affectation; so Noddy risked the consequences, and began to play Mozart's *Ah! Perdona!* She had only got half way through it, when Mrs Muciller and Julia appeared at the window. Noddy shut up the piano, threw down her music, and fled.

'What impertinence!' ejaculated the widow. She was so fairly astounded at Noddy's barefaced impudence, as to be betrayed into making this remark aloud—and Frank Geogagan heard it. She had the tact, however, at once to divine it, and to correct her mistake. 'What impertinence, Mr Frank, of you, to be sure, to come and take us all by surprise without a word of warning! However, we must try and overlook it, as it is your first offence. I'm sure I hope it will not be the last. We are delighted to receive you, although, had you told us when to expect you, we might have given you a better reception.'

'Well,' said Mr Frank (but he detected the artifice), 'I thought I told you pretty exactly. I said "in a day or two," if I remember right, and I came in "a day" instead of "two," to shew my anxiety to pay my earliest respects to my aunt—and her daughter—for I presume this is Julia?' Julia made a most finished *révérence*, and offered her hand in the most approved style. Julia was well and carefully dressed for the croquet party. 'That is fortunate, at anyrate,' Mrs Muciller thought. 'We might have been surprised at greater disadvantage. So much depends upon first impressions.'

A few interchanges of courtesies from the ladies, with commonplaces from Mr Frank, and Mrs Muciller and her daughter retired to remove their bonnets—if the little bits of flowers and lace adorning their hair might be so designated. Mrs Muciller took this opportunity of administering a severe rebuke to Noddy upon her boldness, forwardness, and presumption in attempting to entertain their visitor in a manner so unbecoming. It was not couched in gentle terms, but in words that sting the more from having truth in them. She reminded Noddy of her dependence, of her prospects as a governess, of her own father's position (he was Mrs Muciller's first husband, be it remembered), and contrasted these with her behaviour not to her guest, but to Mrs Muciller's. If the sting of a rebuke be any criterion of its deservedness, Mrs Muciller's was richly merited, for poor Noddy went away to cry where there were no eyes to triumph over her distress.

But Mrs Muciller was a student of expediency. She felt it would be undesirable (a favourite word of hers) that Noddy should continue to take her meals apart from the family, with a visitor in the house. The continuance of such a course would convey an impression, not so much false, as undesirable. She therefore 'desired' Miss Norah's presence at supper, and made known her wishes for the future. But Noddy pleaded headache as excuse for that evening, and remained in her room, hearing the sounds of music come faintly up from the drawing-room when the door was opened, till bedtime.

Next morning, Noddy was up and about soon after the lark. As blithely as he, she was singing

about her work, for there is nothing in all the world like cheerful work to prevent any one feeling dull and unhappy. How strange a drawing-room looks in the morning-light, in all the disarrangement of only a 'little music' of the night before! The piano heaped up with songs—songs on the floor—songs on the tables, on the chairs—here and there—everywhere. Furniture untidy and displaced—antimacassars to be newly smoothed and arranged. Confusion that the sun lights up into chaotic disorder, but which candlelight eyes do not notice. Nobody ever dared touch the drawing-room to 'tidy' it but Noddy—that was her particular province and her pride. There she was, that bright June morning, sweeping and sweeping away, and singing, as her mind, like the lark's, soared above the dust.

'Bravo! Cousin Noddy!' It was Mr Frank, who had been strolling about the lawn with a cigar in the fresh morning air, and who had walked up to the window.

'Oh, dear,' said Noddy, 'please, don't tease me. Don't you see I'm busy?'

'I'm coming in to see,' said Mr Geogagan, entering the casement.

Noddy looked pleasant enough as she was surprised in her print morning dress—her brown hair neatly arranged close to her head, where it could not stop without struggling out into little curls here and there; and a faint blush on her cheeks—partly shy, partly vexed at being caught, and partly ashamed of being vexed. 'Oh, please, go away—do—or I must sweep you up,' she entreated; and 'Oh, please, go away,' she added more seriously, remembering Mrs Muciller had cautioned her respecting her behaviour to Mr Geogagan. So Mr Frank went and finished his cigar by himself.

THE CROW.

SHAKESPEARE tells us that snowy purity itself need not hope to escape the shafts of calumny; that being the case, it is only according to the nature of things that Slander should empty her quiver when the object of her unkind attentions is as black as a crow. Luckily, her arrows are not so deadly as her malice would have them, or the crow would long ago have been extinct as the dodo; but, like his relative, the priest-banned jackdaw of Rheims, he is not a bit the worse for all the hard words levelled at him, merely because he happens to have a good black coat to his back.

Pliny calls the crow a bird of ill-omened garrulity, most inauspicious at the time of incubation, or just after the summer solstice. The appearance of a flight of crows upon the left of their camp sufficed to cow the courage of the soldiers of old Rome, since they looked upon it as a certain sign of defeat, as certain as when the birds hovered or passed over their standards. So Shakspeare's Cassius presages misfortune at Philippi:

Ravens, crows, and kites
Fly o'er our heads, and downward look on us
As we were sickly prey; these shadows seem
A canopy most fatal, under which
Our army lies, ready to give up the ghost.

The Cingalese to this day draw auguries from the movements of these birds: the direction of their flight, the numbers in which they assemble, the tone in which they croak, their choice of roosting-

places, are all held ominous of evil or prophetic of good fortune. In many parts of Europe, the fact of a crow croaking thrice as he flies over a house is considered a sure prognostic of the death of some member of the family. An astrological writer declares pestilence and famine are infallibly at hand when the crows desert the woods, 'because these melancholy birds, bearing the characters of Saturn, the author of famine and mortality, have a very early perception of the bad disposition of that planet.' Kutty, the Quaker doctor and diarist, pays the crow the compliment of the following comparison: 'A physician in high reputation is like a carrion crow, he thrives on the diseases and impending death of his brother; he appears only in the time of calamity and distress, and very often when all dependence on him is like on a broken reed of Egypt.' Without discussing the justice of the comparison as regards the doctor, it certainly is an absurd one as regards the bird, for the crow puts in an appearance at all times and seasons. Birds possessing an undoubted prevision of atmospheric changes, the crow may have some claim to the character of weather-prophet. Virgil says its croaking forebodes rain; an old English writer says foul weather may be looked for when crows make a hoarse, hollow, sorrowful noise as if they sobbed; if they stalk into the water, or become very garrulous towards evening, rain is coming; but hot and dry weather is to be expected when they gather together in great companies, or call loudly and clearly in the early morning. A shrewd Scotch observer remarks that crows have a very keen and correct perception of changes in the weather, and that stormy winds may be presaged when they feed greedily, and fly speedily along the lower edges of the glens; while, if they betake themselves to sheltered places when the tempest begins, it is a certain indication that it will increase to a hurricane. Still, their weather-wisdom does not suffice to save them from coming destruction. In 1839, thirty-three thousand dead crows were counted on the shores of a lake in Westmeath, after a violent storm; a few years ago, the beach of Crow Island, a favourite resort of the Ceylon crows, was strewn with the remains of the birds killed by a thunder-storm; and when Pea Patch Island was inundated one night, the shores for miles were blackened by the bodies of thousands of unlucky crows, as the streets of Calcutta were filled with them after the last great cyclone swept the Indian continent.

Our sable subject owes no little of his evil reputation to the fact, that nature has not cursed him with a fastidious palate; but if he can make a meal off what a bird of nicer taste would rather starve than touch, he only does so when nothing better is to be got. There is no doubt that when the choice is given him, he prefers dining upon a tender leveret or young rabbit; and he will work hard enough at unearthing grubs and worms where he can earn a fair wage for his labour. It must be admitted the crow has an unfortunate liking for poached eggs, combined with a blissful ignorance of the sacredness of a partridge's or pheasant's nest, while he will not hesitate at appropriating stray ducklings or chickens, if they come in his way. When stealing eggs, he generally impales them dexterously on his bill, but not always; Mr Weir frightened a flying crow into dropping his burden, and found it was a wild-duck's egg, perfectly whole. Another crime of which this bird is, upon very

strong evidence, accused, is that of putting sickly sheep out of their misery; and, as Mr Hogg puts it, of descending to the most dishonourable dodges to maintain himself in good condition. That gentleman personally complains that while at other times his farm was only favoured by the patronage of a single pair of crows, in the lambing-season the hills swarmed with them, ready to take advantage of the ewes in their hour of trouble, and destroy both them and their offspring. The crow is by no means a one-ideal bird. Small feathered game he strikes as it flies; sheep, and such-like victims, he first disables by picking out their eyes; if he gets hold of a nut, he cracks the shell by dropping it again and again from a great height. One was seen to kill a young duck by laying it upon the ground, and then walking backwards and forwards over it until its life was trodden out of it; and the Roman naturalist tells us of a thirsty crow heaping stones in an urn containing rain-water it could not reach, until it brought the draught to a convenient height.

Somebody, however, has said a good word in behalf of the crow; Friar Glantville deposing: 'In Exameron, it is said the mildness of the crow is wonderful, for when the old crows in age be both naked and bare of covering, the young ones cover them with their feathers and feed them. And when they wax old and feeble, the young crows undersit them, and rear them up with their wings, and comfort them to use to fly to bring their members that be diseased into state again.' Although it is hard to believe in such filial affection on the part of the young crows, we may say that the old birds deserve every kindness from them, seeing they tend upon their offspring long after they can fly, instead of, like most other birds, leaving the youngsters to their own devices at the earliest possible period. Indeed, the crow is a model parent. When Mr Weir had deprived a lady-crow of her liege lord, he was astonished by finding her provided with a second mate before three days had elapsed. Determined to get rid of the family, he next shot the hen bird; but even her death did not suffice, for the male bird continued to feed the motherless brood, and persevered in performing his paternal duty until he paid for his constancy with his life.

The note of the crow is said to have twenty-five modulations. He possesses the capacity of imitation in an extraordinary degree. 'At the moment I am writing this,' says Pliny, 'there is in the city of Rome a crow, which belongs to a Roman of equestrian rank, and was brought from Bætica, able to pronounce several connected words, and repeatedly learning fresh ones.' There is nothing very surprising in this, considering that the corvine family is famous for its possession of the often worthless gift of the gab. This imitative faculty makes the crow an amusing pet; he is easily tamed, being of a sociable temperament, and may be taught many tricks, while he is not incapable of attachment. Mr Weir kept one for some time, which flew round about the neighbourhood in the day, and roosted at night in his shrubbery. The sound of his master's voice was enough to bring him to him immediately to receive his caressings, but he sharply resented any stranger's making free to stroke his back. This bird's favourite amusement was to peck the heels of barefooted urchins. His memory was astonishing. One Monday morning, after being satiated

with food, he picked up a mole in the orchard, and hopped with his prize into the garden, where he buried it so nicely, that his master, who had been watching his proceedings, could not discover where he had put it. As his wings had been clipped, to prevent him flying over the garden-wall, he was unable to get into the garden again until the Saturday evening, when, seeing the door was open, he hopped at once to the very spot where the mole lay hidden, and disinterred it in the twinkling of an eye. In 1807, a gentleman told the following story in a magazine: 'In spring 1789, a boy brought a nestling crow to my house, where he remained until the harvest following, when he disappeared. In June 1790, I observed a crow approaching near the house, and suspected it might be my old bird. I threw a piece of bread to him, which he immediately picked up. From that time he paid regular visits, and is known by the name of Wattie. After pairing, he brings his mate with him, who waits for him at a distance until he returns with his allowance, which they eat very lovingly together. In breeding-time, he comes very often, and when his young take wing, brings them to a little distance from the house. If he finds the door fast, he first caws, then thumps on the door with his bill, and if still unsuccessful, utters a pretty loud sound like the barking of a little dog. If he meets me at a distance from the house, he comes up to me, and if coming home, accompanies me all the way, either hopping or taking short flights. He once recognised me three miles from home, and I was obliged to beg some bread to pacify him!'

Some writers credit the corvine tribe with possessing an organisation unheard of among any other members of the ornithological kingdom, actually averring that they hold regular assizes for the trial of offenders who have set at naught the laws of the black community. Edmonston declares the crows of Zealand seldom associate, except when they meet together for the purpose of holding a crows' court, when numbers of them assemble on a particular hill or in a particular field. All the delegates having arrived, proceedings are opened by a general croaking, and after a while the whole body fall upon two or three individuals, and put them to death, dispersing immediately afterwards. It would seem the crow, like Coventry Patmore, believes

That penalty is best to bear
Which follows soonest upon crime.

Landt not only corroborates Edmonston's story, but pretends he was able to distinguish the judges, jury, council, and accusers!

A belief was long current in England that it was penal to kill a crow within five miles of London. The crow has certainly been honoured with the notice of parliament, but rather by way of proscription than protection. In 1532, an act was passed to encourage the destruction of choughs, crows, and rooks, because they bred and increased too fast in the realm, yearly consuming and devouring marvellous quantities of corn and grain of all kinds, and destroying the roofs of barns, ricks, and stacks, threatening thereby great undoing of the tillers, husbandmen, and sowers of the earth. After this terrible indictment, by way of preamble, the act ordered all landowners to do their utmost to exterminate the criminals, upon

pain of being heavily amerced. It also directed that every parish should provide itself with nets for crow-catching; while the farmers and tenants were to meet from time to time, to take counsel together as to the best means of destroying their supposed foes. Moreover, every occupier of land was bound to give any one asking for it a day's sport over his land, allowing the sportsman to carry away all the crows he succeeded in capturing, and paying him at the rate of twopence a dozen for his trouble; but every one was warned against making the act a pretence for killing doves and pigeons. It is evident the legislature had no faith in the prescription of those wise men of old, who, Lupton tells us, taught that crows were to be kept at a distance by burying a new earthen pot tenanted by a toad in the middle of a field.

The Carrion Crow makes itself at home in every climate habitable by man; it is found everywhere in Western, but is rarer in Eastern Europe. Well-wooded countries are its delight. Plentiful in England and the southern parts of Scotland, the carrion crows are seldom seen in the central and northern portions of the latter country. They are not very sociable together, more than two being rarely seen in company. About February, they set about constructing their nests of twigs, lined with moss, hair, and other soft material, and fenced externally with half-rotten twigs; and when they have settled down to housekeeping, they are very particular in carrying away the refuse of their meals, depositing it a considerable distance off. Suspicious in the extreme, they give humankind a wide berth, especially if they perceive anything in the shape of a shooting-iron; but they are as bold as they are wary, and will make a good fight of it against much bigger birds than themselves. The Royston Crow (*Corvus cornix*) differs little from the common crow, save in the colour of its plumage, which is ash-gray tinged with purple. It is a graver bird than its relative, but has the peculiarity of leaving its quarters in some parts of England in the summer-time. White of Selborne says: 'Royston or gray crows are winter-birds, that come much about the same time with the woodcock; they, like the field-fare and redwing, have no apparent reason for migration, for as they fare in the winter like their congeners, so might they, in all appearance, in the summer.' What makes this conduct more inexplicable, is that in Scotland the birds remain stationary all the year round. Mr Jesse infers that the gray crows seen in England during the winter only, are visitors from Sweden and Norway.

The rector of Ousby, Cumberland, writing to Mr Urban in 1709, advocates the protection of the crow as a national benefactor, doing his part towards providing material for England's navy, when its ships were hearts of oak. Mr Robinson says: 'About twenty-five years ago, coming from Rose Castle early in the morning, I observed a great number of crows very busy at their work upon a declining ground of a mossy surface. I went out of my way on purpose to view their labouring, and found they were planting a grove of oaks. They first made little holes in the earth with their bills, going about and about till the hole was deep enough, and then they dropped in the acorn, and covered it with earth and moss. This young plantation is now growing up to a thick grove of oaks, fit for use, and of height sufficient

for them to build their nests in. I told it to the owner of the ground, who took care to secure their growth and rising.' A belief in the planting propensities of the crow, led the Dutch to take him under their protection, when they became masters of Ceylon and its cinnamon groves, and inflict severe punishment upon any one interfering with his life or liberty. Bold enough naturally, the small glossy Ceylon Crow (*Corvus splendens*) has, thanks to years of impunity, become the most impudent and audacious of birds. Colombo swarms with these black citizens, ever on the watch to enrich themselves at the expense of humanity; and doors and windows being oftener open than shut, they have every opportunity of indulging their thievish proclivities. Nothing portable is safe from them. Workboxes, baskets, paper parcels, are all deftly opened and overhauled, and anything taking their fancy quickly carried off, though what use crows can find for lace-bordered handkerchiefs, Paris kid gloves, and similar plunder, it is hard to conceive. So little fear have they of being punished for their larcenies, that they will join a dinner-party without invitation, pounce upon any tit-bits they spy on the table, and wing their way out of doors to enjoy their booty at their leisure.

The common black crow is unknown in America, although that continent owes a member of the race sufficiently like it to have been long held identical; but the American Crow (*Corvus Americanus*) is now generally admitted to be a distinct species, being less in size, and having a very different voice, but in all other respects closely allied to his European brother; possessing his courage, sagacity, and omnivorous appetite, to which vegetables, fruit, seeds, snakes, lizards, grubs, insects, eggs, and carrion are alike welcome. Mr Lord found this species more than abundant in British Columbia, and bears emphatic testimony to its vocal capabilities. 'If birds,' he writes, 'are gifted with ventriloquial powers, I should say the Barking Crow was at the top of the profession. Wandering through the forest encircling the prairie, one's ears are dinned by the extraordinary sounds made by these crows. Sometimes it seems as if these hidden polyphonists were making all sorts of disagreeable fun of you, and chuckling hoarsely at their own jokes; then one goes in for a bit of song, and others readily taking it up, they manage between them to raise a combination of discords, compared to which the parrots' screams in the Zoological Gardens is whispered melody. They shriek, yell, laugh, shout, whistle, scream and bark, driving one to wish all the crows in British Columbia were consigned to the depths of Hades.' We have given the American crow the benefit of this panegyric, because the naturalist of Vancouver's Land calls it *Corvus Americanus*, but we feel doubtful as to whether he is not describing the fish crow; a doubt strengthened by his admitting the strong resemblance between it and Baird's North-western fish crow, while he accords that diminutive bird the dignity of being a species, on the ground that it builds a domed nest, which the other never does.

The Fish Crow proper (*Corvus ossifragus*) is peculiar to America, and was first observed by Wilson on the Georgian sea-coast. It abounds at all seasons in the maritime districts of the Southern States, a range beyond which it cannot be said to extend, although it is found in spring as far north

as New York, and is known to breed in New Jersey, returning southward as soon as cold weather sets in. Like the common crow in appearance, but much smaller in size, the fish crows fly in flocks, keeping in pairs as they fly. They haunt the river-banks, salt-ponds, and marshes, hovering watchfully over streams, on the look-out for dead fish, floating carrion, or small fry, which they secure with their claws as the water hurries by. They will dive after small crabs or water-lizards, and often force the gulls to drop the fish they have caught. Not being able to feed upon the wing, the fish crows retire to the nearest trees, to discuss their meal conveniently, and indulge in a congratulatory *ha, ha, ha* over it. Partial though they be to fishy diet, they are not above robbing the nests of other birds, even such big birds as the cormorant; but they take good care to see the owner off the premises before committing a burglary.

Audubon mentions a case where more than six hundred crows were shot on the carcass of a horse placed at shooting-distance from the stable, by which the farmer got enough feathers to fill a bed, besides making as much money by the premiums and the quills as the horse was worth when alive. Somebody relates that a planter, living at a place called Caney—should it not be Canny?—Creek, sowed his crops in peace, by adopting the following ingenious plan of circumventing the crows without destroying them. Before sowing a field, he set some negroes at work running a long horsehair through every grain of a bushel of Indian corn, previously soaked and softened. This prepared seed was scattered over the field, and picked up by the crows, who found the horsehair more than they could swallow. The ends dangled from their beaks, and irritated their throats, causing the victims to make such an immense to-do, and express their disgust in such eloquent terms, that not only themselves, but their luckier comrades, took especial care to avoid the scene of their discomfiture for some time to come.

A COUNTY FAMILY.

CHAPTER XXIX.—MRS BLACKBURN SEES A GHOST.

THE winter was over and gone, and still the great Blackburn vault remained without the prey for which, in all men's eyes, it seemed to have yawned so long. The Squire was yet alive; and even, as the wise doctors said, who had come again from town to visit him, better—at all events less restless and discomposed. They had recommended change of air—removal to some convenient distance; and it was in contemplation, when the days grew warmer, to transport the invalid to that sheltered cottage on the Curlew of which we have already spoken. There was no more chance of his recovery than of Fisherman Richard, who had built the place, coming back to claim his own again. But there was so far an improvement in the sick man's state, that it was now wholly passive; there were no more yearning glances, dumb appeals. He had never suffered bodily pain, and now his mind seemed still and quiet as his limbs.

None but his wife and son, and Stanhope, guessed the cause. Even Ellen, seeing his eyes often fixed upon the pedigree (which had been transferred from the old place to his chamber-wall), believed that it was that which so contented him.

He saw the seasons change in the great mirror—the snow dissolve, the green appear; the awakening life of bud and branch—but without pain or pleasure. He watched the familiar faces about his bed with the same listless look as he gazed on the motes in the sunbeams.

Heaven only knows what he thought. We who live and move can scarcely picture how looks the world to those who only have their being in it.

The outside folk—his friends and neighbours—did not speculate upon that matter, but counted him for dead already, except that they did not call upon the family with 'kind inquiries.' Even to those about him it sometimes seemed so. The prayers which Ellen never omitted to read to him, night and morning, fell on deaf ears, and might have been the service for the dead.

William, though he well knew he was not the heir, began to exercise the rights of heirship, and rode and strode about his father's lands as though they were his own; and whether he rode or strode, a 'beggar on horseback' was what the people called him. Mere power, such as is neither influence nor authority, was very sweet to him, as it is to all brutal natures; and he misused it sorely. And yet it angered him to know that he was hated. He was jealous of the respectful salutations with which Ellen was welcomed by the meanest hind, as she passed by; although all the village, and the poorest most of all, had cause to like her, as he knew, and more or less had cause to dislike him. He was jealous of the kindness with which Stanhope was universally regarded, notwithstanding that the young Squire of Curlew Hall had not the means to 'do his duty by the land,' that is, by those who lived by it. He was jealous of the cheery looks which Mr Waller, always chatty, always gay, inspired. He was jealous, even though his rival in her affections was in the grave, with respect to Lucy; and had had the meanness, on some pretence, to get dismissed a gardener whom he had overheard talking to her about 'young Squire Richard as was dead and gone.' He hated the county generally, partly because his presence in the hunting-field had not been received with enthusiasm by the other red-coats, and partly because he had not been made a magistrate. The Blackburns had always been put upon the bench as soon as they were of legal age, and his father had had that responsibility conferred upon him directly he had succeeded to his inheritance. Why, then, was he left out in the cold? The cabal against him, it seemed, had not been confined to his own home.

It was curious how this denial of the mere insignia of respectability—since for the thing itself he cared nothing—ranked in his mind. In reality, only there is nothing so unreasonable as intense selfishness, William Blackburn had had every opportunity of 'getting on' in the neighbourhood afforded him. Country-folk are the last to judge men of their own class upon their own merits, or he would have had small chance indeed; scores of welcoming hands had been held out to him, but in return he had only shewn the cloven foot. His behaviour to his parents, and especially to Lucy, was resented; and besides, notwithstanding the shortness of his sojourn at Redcombe, he had openly, more than once, shocked a by no means fastidious public opinion. As to the magistracy, Stanhope, though the lord-lieutenant was

personally known to him, had declined point-blank to move in the matter, and had even expressed himself to be, 'under the circumstances, astonished at such a request.' Mr Waller (who would himself perhaps have found a difficulty in getting J.P. tacked to his name, had not M.P. been there already) had recommended patience, and hinted that there would be a better chance of such promotion when he had formed some matrimonial connection with a county family; at which William's brow darkened visibly, for reasons best known to himself. He had received a letter on the very morning on which that remark was made, and had it then in his pocket, which, besides its intrinsically unpleasant nature, reminded him bitterly enough of how far off was that consummation of his hopes, his marriage with Lucy Waller. This communication ran as follows:

MY DEAR MR BLACKBURN—I daresay you will scarcely remember this handwriting; and yet it comes from one who is a sort of kin to you [here Mr William winced and swore a great oath]. Some men might take it ill that you never wrote a line to tell me of my poor niece's death; but it is likely enough, not being an habitual correspondent of yours truly, you did not know my address, which indeed is generally pretty changeable, as at present. If I had chanced to see the notice in the *Times*, I should certainly have come, no matter what distance, to pay my last tribute of respect to your late wife's memory [here Mr William expressed incredulity in the strongest language]. However, as business is bringing me northward shortly, I will do myself the pleasure of just looking in at Blackburn Manor. It was only quite by chance, and within the last day or two, I heard of your *luck*. What a pity it is poor Bess never lived to see it! Richardson also joins with me in felicitations [never did 'felicitated' man wear so incongruous a look as William Blackburn wore as he read that word] upon your position and *prospects*. Still, you must not forget old friends.—Yours very sincerely,
JOHN DEAN.

This unwelcome letter was no doubt intentionally unfurnished with an address, so that Mr William Blackburn was unable to indulge himself in what would have been an immense relief under the circumstances, the sending an appropriate reply by return of post. 'He wants money, this impudent scoundrel,' ejaculated William. 'He and Richardson, they think to put the screw on, on account of that confounded Chester business. But not one penny of hush-money do they get out of me. I had rather they told the whole story than not indeed, for it would set me free of this fellow Stanhope; he would have no hold upon me then, except that—curse him!—he has got that will in keeping. He took it to Curlew Hall that very day, I know he did. Yes, I must not break with him—just yet—whatever happens.—But why does this fellow prate so much about Bess? He uses her as a stalking-horse, of course. He dared not shew his face here but for that. And yet it is clear he suspects nothing. If he only *knew*—why this man would be a stone about my neck for all my days. I must see him, I suppose, since I cannot prevent his coming. But I will not give him a shilling, not a sixpence—let him do his worst. I believe if he told all, that Waller is so deeply dipped, that it would make no difference now as

regards Lucy. But what is her father's consent, or even hers, to me' (and William Blackburn ground his teeth), 'while there is that woman at Formosa!'

It was in vain for him to recapitulate what an out-of-the-way place Formosa was, and all the arguments he had so often used with himself against the probability of Bess turning up to trouble him. The very thought of the risk he should incur, if he married while she was alive, brought the perspiration out upon his forehead.

It may be judged whether this was a propitious morning for Mr Waller to hint to the young Squire that an eligible matrimonial connection was the only thing to set himself right with the county and the lord-lieutenant.

Another annoyance chanced to arise that day from the same source, although of a very different and quite unsubstantial kind; but then annoyances are often irksome in inverse proportion to their substance. Just as he had contrived to put that letter of Uncle Dean, with the bitter recollections it evoked, out of his mind, his mother, of all people in the world, must needs awaken them again. She had driven out with Lucy to 'The Fishery,' to give certain final directions there for the reception of the family, and had come back, to use her own expression, 'much upset;' by which she meant, not that she had been frequently thrown out of the carriage, but was seriously indisposed. Perhaps, as Lucy suggested to Ellen, the idea of leaving Redcombe under such sad circumstances, since it was out of all human probability that her husband would be brought back thither—save to the churchyard—had overcome her; she had borne up wonderfully all day, however, until on their road home, when she had given way in a rather unexpected, and apparently uncalled-for manner in Redmoor fir-grove.—'Just where it is so steep, you know, that one always gets out and walks; your grandmother and I were walking, and she bade me go on at my own pace, since waiting for her made her nervous; and although loath to leave her, I did so; but finding she did not appear within a reasonable time, and since the coachman feared that the horses, being heated, would catch cold waiting too long on the brow of the hill, I went back, to give Mrs Blackburn my arm to help her up the steep. I found her leaning against a tree, not out of breath, but very pale and trembling, and she said something had given her a turn.'

'Ah, then I know what it was, Lucy,' interrupted Ellen sadly; 'I can guess why that particular place should affect poor dear grandmother: it was in that very fir-grove, as she once told me, that she and grandfather had a last interview with his mother. He was but a few weeks married, then a young and handsome bridegroom; and I daresay the sudden recollection of him as he then was, involuntarily contrasted itself in her mind with his present woful condition.'

'I think that must have been it,' assented Lucy, 'for she said something, I could not quite understand, about a warning and your poor grandfather. I am sure it is a miracle to me that Mrs Blackburn gives way so seldom, considering her trials.'

Indeed, the stout old lady, notwithstanding that tenderness of her heart, which evinced itself in such culpable weakness with respect to her son, was by no means easily cast down, but went about her household duties bravely, and nursed the sick

man in true wifely fashion night and day, the only one about him who in her heart of hearts had had even until now some hope of him yet. She was one of those who have faith in the doctor while he prophesies smooth things, but when he shakes his head, who comfort themselves with a 'Well, well, science is often mistaken, and after all we are in God's hands;' as though we had not been there before. But all that evening good Mrs Blackburn kept sorrowful silence, and more than once considerably embarrassed Mr Waller by bursting into tears. To weep in public was, in that gentleman's eyes, an unpardonable solecism ('Good Heavens,' whispered he to Stanhope on the second occasion of this ebullition, 'are we in the Forest of Bondy?'), an impulse which, if generally indulged in, would make the ordinary transactions of life impossible: the idea of some meeting of ruined shareholders, instead of stigmatising one as a scoundrel (against which one might bear up), dissolving into tears! As to Mr William, full of his own personal troubles, he doubtless wondered what the old woman had got to cry about; but sympathy did not prompt him so far as to make inquiry. He had got his greatcoat on, and his cigar in his mouth, about to visit the *Blackburn Arms* as usual after dinner, when his mother beckoned him into the deserted dining-room.

'O Willy,' said she, 'I have been wanting to speak to you all the evening, but could not get you alone. I have had such a shock to-day as you cannot imagine; and I am only thankful that it did not happen to you.'

'Shock; well, I'm not easily shocked, and I dare say I could have stood it,' returned William gruffly.

'What's happened now?'

'A very dreadful thing, Willy. I have had a message from the grave. I have seen a ghost.'

'Oh, I say; come now. You must have a talk with Mr Allcase when he comes to visit the governor to-morrow. These sort of fancies—for I've heard him say so—are all stomach.'

'But this was not fancy, William, I am very sure. Now, do you sit down and listen.'

'But I want a cigar, mother; and Bill Dykes and Harry Willing have got a match on to-night at four corners.'

'Never mind *them*, William,' returned Mrs Blackburn gravely; 'and have your cigar here if you please. If you had seen what I have seen this day, you would be in no humour for games or smoking.'

'I will just light up, however, in the meantime,' said Mr William contemptuously, for he had drunk his fill, and was by no means in a condition favourable to superstitious fears.—'Now, then, I'm all attention; fire away.'

'I daresay you have heard, Willy,' began his mother slowly, with her hand upon his knee, 'of that old legend about the Blackburn folk, that before they die they have each a warning of their end sent from the other world, that the *last* dead Blackburn returns to tell the doomed one of his race that his time has come to depart also.'

'I have heard some twaddle of the kind,' said William carelessly. 'They say in the village that young Richard's dead mother was seen in the park the night before her son popped off the hooks so suddenly; but it's all rubbish of course. And indeed she did not happen to be a Blackburn at all.'

'That is no matter, Willy; she was a Blackburn

by marriage, if not by blood. Your grandmother walked on the terrace the night before her wicked husband breathed his last. It is always the last dead that gives the warning.'

Mr William, lying back in his arm-chair at ease, expelled his tobacco-smoke in rings, an accomplishment of which he was unreasonably proud, and inquired scornfully: 'Well, what then? Have you seen this young gentleman to-day?' and he pointed to the picture of his cousin Richard that hung above the mantelpiece.

'No, Willy; but I have seen your wife—poor Bess.'

William Blackburn bounded from his chair with a fearful oath.

'Don't swear, Willy—don't swear, for Heaven's sake; you don't know how soon you may be called to answer for such words. What I saw was a warning for one of your race; but who shall say for whom? At first, of course, I only thought of your poor father. He is the likeliest to go, dear soul, and the fittest for it. Ah, if you could but see him lying day and night, night and day, patient and gentle-faced as the stone angel over the church door! I know by his look that he has forgiven me for meddling with his papers, though, indeed, it was very wrong of me to do so; and I do think, if you were to go and see him once again, Willy'—

'Never you mind me and father. You tell me about what you saw, mother; tell me everything.' He had sat down again now, and had hidden his eyes behind his hand, but his features worked beneath it restlessly.

'I knew it would move you, my dear boy—I knew it would touch you; and I hope it will work for good. I know you are not wicked, as some believe, but only a little wild and thoughtless. Yet, O remember, that it is not always the old and ailing that are taken first, but oftentimes the young and strong. Think, if this should be a warning sent to you, my darling—to you, instead of'—

'Will you tell me what you saw?' broke in her son with savage impatience. 'That first, and what you think of it afterwards. What, in the Fiend's name, did you *see*, mother?'

For a moment, the poor lady's speech was choked by sobs. For the first time, perhaps, it was borne home to her that this son of hers had indeed a heart of stone; but he muttered something by way of an apology for his tone and temper: he had been put out, he said, by an infernal business letter that morning. And her hand once more rested on his knee as she resumed her story.

'We were walking—Lucy and I—up the short-cut through Redmoor fir-grove, while the carriage went up the road. I had sent Lucy on before, because I like to go my own pace, and not feel hurried; and presently she had left me far behind, and I was quite alone. It was the very place where fifty years ago, Willy, your father and I met Russell Blackburn's wife for the last time, and the thoughts of old times crowded in upon me, so that I stopped and lingered more than I needed to do, though the way was steep.'

'You had your mind, then, full of the past, and death, and such like?' observed William, with interest.

'No doubt, Willy; and I may have also even thought of Bess herself, as I certainly did of you, dear boy. But if I did, I thought of her less than

any. Then presently, in the silence of the grove—for you know there was not a breath of wind to-day—I heard steps behind me. I was not surprised, for the path is used by all folks on foot coming from Mosedale to Redcombe, nor in the least degree agitated or alarmed. As the steps grew nearer, I moved to one side of the path, in order to let the person pass me, for whoever it was, she was a faster walker than I.

'But how did you know it was a woman?'

'Because I heard her dress brush against the trees.'

'She was so close as that, was she?' inquired William hoarsely.

'She was at one time, but not when I looked round. I walked on and on, expecting every instant that she would pass me; but finding that the footsteps ceased, I turned about to see why she had stopped.'

'Well, and what then?'

'Then I saw that it was Bess. It was growing dusk, but I am certain that it was she, and no other. She was a deal older, and more white and wan-looking than when I saw her last; but, as sure as it is my voice you hear, Willy, it was your dead wife.'

'Did you speak to her?' As William put this question, he shot through his fingers an eager glance at his mother's face: it was a careworn and wrinkled one enough, but as honest and open as the smoothest; he need not have been afraid of any concealment there.

'Speak to her? No, indeed, Willy. I was much too skeared. My limbs seemed to give way, and I sank down trembling all of a heap against a tree-trunk. Indeed, for a moment, I shut my eyes for fear, yet not so long that if it had been anything but a ghost, it could never have got out of sight; and yet, when I looked again, Willy, there was nothing there.'

'No; and there never was anything there, mother,' said William, forcing a laugh, 'you may take your oath of that.'

'I tell you, Willy,' answered Mrs Blackburn solemnly, 'I am not more certain that I see you now than that I saw Bess to-day. Moreover, she saw me, for which, indeed, without doubt, she had been sent. O Willy, Willy, I cannot keep the terrible thought out of my mind that it was about you she came. It seems so strange else that she should have looked so wan and sorrowful about your father. Oh, repent my darling, for we have all something to be sorry for, and be a good lad while you have yet time. I have never troubled you with such talk of late, Willy; I have been afraid of your ill looks and your tempers, but it has been often in my thoughts to speak of such things.—Kiss me, darling, kiss me. Pray to-night. Oh, how I have prayed for you, Willy! Pray to be a good man.'

'Yes, yes, all right,' said Mr William, submitting, if with no very good grace, to his mother's impassioned caress. 'I will do all that if you on your part will promise me to hold your tongue about this matter. In my opinion, you have been misled by your feelings; you were tired and full of melancholy thoughts, and your imagination has built up the whole affair. It was a mere delusion.'

Mrs Blackburn shook her head, and smiled sadly.

'Well, that's my opinion, I repeat,' said William coldly; 'and I think most people will agree with me. On the other hand, you think you have seen

a ghost. In either case, I judge the thing had better not be talked about. You never said one word of this to Lucy or Ellen, of course?'

'Not a syllable, Willy; and I never shall. This is a secret between you and me—a secret much too sacred, much too awful, to speak to any ear than that which it may concern. Your father, alas! is deaf to every voice, even though it be one from the tomb; but you, Willy, oh, lay it to heart—lay it to heart! You will not go out to-night, darling, among those rough rude men?'

'No, I will not. I promise you that, mother. Good-night. I will just have another cigar, and then to bed.'

But William Blackburn remained in that room for hours, now sitting by the fading embers with moody brow, now starting up to pace the floor with restless steps. Not till the morning light found its way through the closed shutters did he retire to his own chamber; yet after all this counsel with himself, he could come to no more satisfactory conclusion than to hope that all these pains of thought might be in vain. 'The old woman must have been deceived,' he muttered, as he threw himself on his bed. 'It could never have been Bess herself; she would not have dared to come.'

CHAPTER XXX.—MR WILLIAM ENJOYS SOCIETY.

That heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning, was certainly not written of the vicious. To them the beginning of the day more than any other time brings the reproof of Nature. It is then that she chiefly resents upon the wrong-doer his contravention of her laws, and, until he has commenced his daily round of life, hidden himself from her among his base companions, or forgotten her in strong liquors, her presence is irksome and hateful. It was at breakfast of all meals that Mr William Blackburn appeared to least advantage; and on the morning succeeding his long vigil, he was a piteous sight to behold. Mrs Blackburn regarded him with unfeigned terror, as she thought of that mysterious vision of the previous day, and what it might portend.

'I shall be glad indeed,' said she, seeing him heap this and that upon his plate, until it was like the 'Douglas larder,' and yet scarcely swallow a mouthful, 'when the time is ripe for our going to the cottage, for your sake, Willy, almost as much as for that of your poor father. I am sure you want change of air.'

'I don't know whether I shall go to the cottage at all,' answered her son gruffly; 'and, at all events, I shan't go yet.'

'Not go, Willy?' pleaded she. 'Why, you surely would not stop here alone?—What can you have to keep you at Redcombe?'

'Something that women understand nothing about,' growled he—'business.' And with that scanty information she was fain to be content.

It was certainly a business of a light kind, and one that did not keep Mr William within doors. It was his habit to lounge about the grounds, and park, and village all day, the very type of a loafer. But he now confined himself to the grounds only. Instead of his old listless look, his eye seemed ever on the watch, his ear upon the stretch, for some one coming; he would break off suddenly in his speech to listen to sounds that heralded nothing, to stare with eager looks into the distance, where

nothing shewed itself. He was alert, and yet distraught. Doubtless unwilling, for good reasons, to be from home upon Mr Dean's arrival, which would probably occur at some reasonably early hour, he was awaiting that gentleman's visit; for when the dusk began to thicken, he would set out none knew whither, but for such a distance—and it was observed that his steps always took the direction of Mosedale—as often brought him home long after dinner was finished. On one occasion, being later than ever, his mother ventured to remonstrate with him: 'You should consider, dearest Willy, there are guests in the house, and your poor father is not here to do the honours. I do not like to see Mr Waller sitting opposite to me instead of my boy.'

'Very well, mother,' said he, 'it shall not occur again.'

In spite of herself, Mrs Blackburn could not but feel amazed at her son's ready obedience. His tone, if not tender, which perhaps it could not be, for voices lose their tenderness through long disuse, was not rough, but hollow and nervous. His face was deadly pale, and his brow damp, and his whole appearance shewed that he had been walking far and fast.

'How ill and tired you look, Willy; you over-fatigue yourself; and do make haste to change your things, for see, your boots and leggings are quite wet.'

'I came through the furze, and it was heavy with dew,' said he, 'that's all.'

'But how hungry you must be, darling. I will bring my knitting and sit with you while you eat.'

'Yes, do, mother,' said he. It was almost the first time he had expressed a desire for her company, and the poor lady was in raptures. At the same time, this change in his behaviour, which had during the last few days been even unusually brusque and surly, really alarmed her. It struck her that he must surely be ill. The apprehension of the warning vision having had reference to him, recurred to her with redoubled vehemence, for, curiously enough, it had never even entered into her mind that it might be Ellen's life that was imperilled. She had had his favourite viands kept in readiness for him, but he ate scarcely anything, though he drank freely; and this did not tend to make her less anxious. Yet she did not dare to recur directly to that subject, for which he had shewn a particular distaste.

'Mr Allcase called while you were away, Willy, and he thinks the weather is now quite mild enough for us to leave home; and Mr Waller tells me that the Fishery is looking so bright and comfortable, with everything ready for our reception.'

William laid down his knife and fork. 'Has Mr Waller been over yonder to-day?' asked he earnestly.

'Yes, darling; he had business in Mosedale this afternoon, and so very kindly he rode over to see how things were looking at the cottage.'

'When did he go? When did he come back? I mean at what hour?'

'He started after luncheon, and he was home again by six at latest, my dear. I wonder you saw nothing of him upon the moor.'

'I did not go to the moor to-day: I walked in the opposite direction.—How is father?'

'Well, no worse, at all events. Mr Allcase says he can quite bear the journey, and oh, dear Willy, I do so hope you'll go with us. There will be the

fishing, you know; and though there is no billiard-room, Mosedale is quite close; and Lucy and Mr Waller will be almost as much with us there as they are now, although we have no sleeping-room for them in the cottage. Mr Stanhope, too, has kindly promised to stay on with us. I don't think you need be very dull there. Come, dear, it is not often that I ask a favour of you, but for my sake, if not for your own—and I am sure you need the change—do promise me to go with us to the Fishery.'

'Very well, mother; I will go with you, since you make such a point of it.'

'You good, dear boy, you have no idea how happy you make me!' murmured Mrs Blackburn, with dim eyes. 'And now I will leave you to have your cigar in peace upon the terrace.'

'No; I shall not go out again to-night; I have been out enough.—Where are Waller and Stanhope?'

'They are not in the smoking-room, so that you can have it all to yourself, dear. They are playing a game at billiards.'

These two gentlemen were wont to have their cigars together in the Squire's sanctum, unhonoured by Mr William's presence, who found companions more suited to his nature in the saddle-room, or at the public-house. But on this occasion, notwithstanding that he might have had the little room all to himself, he joined their company, and even volunteered to keep their score for them; this he did as usual, with the rest; and the way in which that instrument rapped against the marking-board, through the trembling of his hands, made the two players look at one another significantly: the one remarked in a whisper 'that their friend was like the Cock Lane ghost;' and the other, under cover of a canon, expressed his belief that they were going to have D. T. in the house again before very long. When invited to play himself, Mr William protested he was much too tired; and yet, when the others were about to put away their cues, he persuaded them to have one more game, and still another, until Stanhope declined point-blank. Never had the young Squire shewn himself so docile to his mother, so affable to his guests, as upon that night, nor, it may be added, so disinclined for his own unimproving society. Was it possible that Mr William Blackburn had taken his mother's words to heart at last, and was about to turn over a new leaf?

THE NATIONAL GALLERY.

LOUD roared the tide of life, rapid and vast,
That eddies ceaseless through Trafalgar Square,
As o'er the threshold, up the accustomed stair,
I entered the hushed chambers where the Past
Lingers, its transience caught, its forms made fast,
Its thoughts eternalised by the cunning care
And wonderful fine skill beyond compare
Of Art's great masters. And as there I cast
Long loving looks upon each well-known face
Of monarch, sage, poet, and priest, and saint,
And sought with busy critic brain to trace
The secrets lurking in that world of paint—
The Past in all its grandeur filled the place;
The tumult of to-day seemed far and faint.

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